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ANNUAL REPORT OF THE EXECUTIVE SECRETARY

ILLINOIS SOCIETY FOR PREVENTION OF BLINDNESS

November 18, 1935

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One bitterly cold day last March, I stood on the train platform in Springfield. The rain was freezing as it fell. For one solid week I had tried, with doubtful success, to steer the new Trachoma appropriation bill between the Scylla of the Democratic Sales Tax and the Charybdis of the Republican filibuster.

In the midst of my gloom, I ran into Effie Doan of the I.E.R.C. As we boarded the train I tried to whistle in the dark by saying, "I suppose we can comfort ourselves with the thought that, in spite of this weather, Spring is just around the corner."

Miss Doan laughed and told me she never heard that remark without remembering something that had happened to her four years ago at the very beginning of the bad times. That, too, was a dreary blustery day in March; four banks had just closed and things looked pretty black. Miss Doan sat in her office in Iowa handling case after case of the most pitiful urgency and after awhile she thought perhaps it would cheer her up if she went into the outer office to talk to the clients who were sitting there. When she stepped out and saw that crowd of shivering, steaming humanity, she said, just as I had said, "Well, it looks bad out today but Spring is just around the corner," and back in the room an old man, inadequately clothed and poorly nourished, hopped up and said with the greatest cheeriness, "That's just what I always say, Miss Doan, they can't keep the Spring back no matter what they do."

No agency can do the sort of cooperative work we do without having to face plenty of perplexing and complicated situations. No agency driven by the energy which motivates us can expect to get much done without meeting some opposition. No agency which feels that time is short and the work so great to do can expect to get along without making a few enemies. Often the shadow of politics falls darkly across our path, but, somehow or other, I feel that our work is just like the Spring--they can't keep us back no matter what they do!

Since we cannot operate without the sinews of war, it is a pleasure to report today that we raised our budget from $17,256.00 last year to $18,863.00 this year. I feel that it is distinctly heartening that our budget was raised solely thru our own efforts without appealing to the Community fund.

This year we raised our membership from 1,726 to 1,828 -- a gain of 102 members. The most wonderful feature of our membership this year was that we again doubled our down-state membership, raising it from 197 last year to 442 this year. This is the third successive year that we have accomplished this feat and I want to thank today the down-state men and women who, as members of our new Advisory Council, signed the appeals which brought in 204 new down-state members and a thousand new dollars.

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"When a child loses his sight, he loses many beautiful things. He cannot run freely or go wherever he pleases. There will be no more bright colors in the world for him, no flash of bird wings. His movements once so quick and eager will become slow and timid and his hands will often miss what they seek. He will be lonely because other children do not know how to play with him."

Those words, as you may have guessed, are Helen Keller's and she has painted vividly as she always does, a picture which we, in our work with children, should keep before us every minute. It should make us feel that no detail can be overlooked in our battle to head off blindness for the children in Illinois. It justifies all our work on the training of teachers; on the equipment of sight-saving rooms; on the insistence of a high standard of school lighting; on the best medical attention and the most detailed medical records for our children, and so today I am glad to report on our work with school children for the past year.

When I tell you that our nurses gave visual acuity tests to 9,252 school children this past year; when I tell you that of that number 2,105 were found to be suffering from eye defects of varying degrees of seriousness; when I tell you that, as a result of those surveys, four new sight-saving classes were opened in Illinois--one in Bloomington, one in LaSalle, one in Chicago and one in Peoria; when I tell you that, as a result of all this school work, we were able to ask, and get from the State Legislature, $201,000.00 for the saving of sight in the public schools of the state: when I have told you all this I have only given you the barest outline of the work done; not just by our Society but by school nurses, school doctors, teachers, principals, and superintendents.

The interest aroused in the discovery and correction of eye defects in school children in every community where we work is the thrilling by-product of the energy which we contribute.

In Chicago the Illinois Society, as a part of the Cooperative Health Education Project of the Council, broke the ground by doing a visual survey in the restricted area which the project covers on the north side of Chicago. In the schools of that district--10 public and 3 parochial--we discovered 766 children having uncorrected eye defects. This group we divided into three. (1) Those having very serious eye defects, (2) those having serious defects and (3) those having minor defects.

The very serious defects, numbering 131, we took over as our personal responsibility, first dividing the group into those on relief and those of independent means. Miss Nichols of the Cooperative Project handled all the relief cases through the Supervisors and Medical Workers of the relief and casework agencies and we put on a special worker for the other group. Don't think for a minute that it is easy to go to a parent and tell him that his child has a serious eye defect which must have immediate attention. There are always people who think you are trying to run their lives for them if you are the bearer of such tidings.

I remember one hot day last summer Miss Herely, our worker, told me that she rang a doorbell in this area. A second floor window was thrust up and a very cross face appeared. When Miss Herely told the woman that she had come to find out about her little girl's eyes, the woman said, "I'm just sick and tired of having people coming around here and telling me what to do for my children and besides I'm nearly dead with sunburn." Miss Herely said, "Well, that's too bad. I had a bad case of sunburn myself last week and I found the grandest remedy." When the woman asked her what the remedy was, Miss Herely told her if she would let her in out of the hot sun she would tell her. And so they spent a very amicable hour discussing sunburn, glasses, doctors, etc. Needless to say, the eyes were corrected as well as the sunburn!

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On this group of 131 we have obtained 112 corrections and 12 more are in the process of being corrected. This is about a 90% correction. There were 7 more cases where the parents refused to cooperate--but we aren't through with them yet!

The children in the second group having serious defects of vision, of which there were 191, were also divided into two groups--those on relief and those of independent means. Miss Nichols again referred 55 of these cases to the district Supervisors and Medical workers and the other 136 were referred to the Chicago Board of Health. The Board of Health, after looking through the names, decided they could only take 24 cases and so we were forced to appeal to the Visiting Nurses' Association of that district with the 112 cases left. The Visiting Nurses met us with the utmost cooperation--had a meeting of all the nurses in the district and parcelled out the 112 cases for correction. Already we have a 50% correction on the group of children with serious eye defects, exclusive of the 24 cases referred to the Board of Health on which we have no report, and the V.N.A. report they will be able to get a good many more.

On the third group we sent letters to all the parents telling them that their child had an eye defect and urging them to take steps to have the defect corrected as soon as possible.

Our work did not end with the fitting of glasses during the summer. When school opened in the Fall our nurses went back through the schools to see if the children were wearing the glasses which had been provided for them.

This survey showed the acute need for routine physical examination in the public schools. Sporadic eye examinations unaccompanied by a correction program will never solve the vision problem in Chicago and we earnestly hope that the Chicago Board of Health can see its way clear to returning to the routine physical examinations which they formerly conducted on all school children and which were formerly the basis for fine work on corrections of all physical defects.

On school lighting we have several pleasant things to report. Mr. Bogan so ably interpreted the need for better lighting in the public schools of Chicago that the School Board O.Kd entirely new lighting, up to the highest public school lighting standards, for the 35 sight-saving classes in Chicago.

The Board has also approved of our specifications for painting the walls and ceilings of all school rooms and in the future all rooms in Chicago will come up to sight-saving standards for painting.

In Champaign the sight-saving class was put in one of the older schools. Of course new lighting had to be installed as the lighting standards of the old building did not come up to our specifications. One year later I visited that class and found that the room next to the sight-saving room had lights identical with it. I asked the teacher about it and she laughed and said that the sight-saving class lights had made the light in the adjoining room look so inadequate that they had to put in better lights in self defense.

I met Miss Root just previous to this meeting and told her I was going to tell this story in the report and she said, "You can tell an even better story than that. Every room in that school was equipped with sight-saving lights this summer!"

A letter from a school principal in Decatur asking for specifications for painting the walls and ceilings in his entire building is just an echo of our educational work down there four years ago.

In Bloomington one parochial school was entirely repainted throughout according to sight-saving standards. New lights, meeting the highest requirements, were installed and the building was entirely equipped with sight-saving shades.

Since entrance to a sight-saving class is dependent on mental rating and since mentally defective children are excluded from our classes and since we have a feeling that the ordinary mental test is unfair to a child with defective vision, this past year we requested the Institute for Juvenile Research to put a special worker on the revision of the regular test and the formulation of a new test for our children. Of the 60 children examined in Chicago, where the new tests have been tried out, 7 children have been given double promotions on the strength of the revised test and the work they are doing bears out the wisdom of the new ratings.

Every sight-saving teacher in Illinois is now trained and we have 11 trained teachers in reserve for new classes to be opened. This training has been up-hill work and has all been accomplished in the past six years.

Our classes have grown from 16 classes in 1929 to 58 this Fall, scattered throughout the state.

Our appropriations have jumped in the past six years from $26,000. to $201,000.

Our first appropriation bill had just one line which said there was to be $26,000 appropriated to the City of Chicago for sight-saving classes. In the first year of the new Enabling Act, when it became possible to open down-state sight-saving classes, we added a line for Joliet, one for Rockford, and one for Rock Island. At the next Legislature we added a line for Aurora, one for Springfield and one for Evanston. That year I was told by some of the finance people in Springfield that we ought to make a blanket appropriation because our bill was so "messy" looking. But I insisted that I felt that our method of appropriating was much safer than a blanket appropriation because the money for each town was estimated according to the number of children needing the special education and, as this was a definite act of the Legislature, the money could not be pro-rated. Today our appropriation bill is two and a half pages long and the sight-saving classes have always gotten exactly what the Legislature appropriated for them whereas, I am told, the classes for crippled children, whose appropriation is written in blanket form, have only gotten $55 per child although the Enabling Act allows them $300 per child. With classes scattered throughout the state of Illinois, it is much more valuable, from an educational standpoint, to have each one of the legislators from the towns in which the sight-saving classes are located, feel that it is his own personal responsibility to get his own local appropriation at the Legislature.

The exuberance which passes for patriotism every July 4th in these United States of America constitutes an interesting phenomena. A cursory examination of the newspapers would lead us to believe that we now have a sane Fourth. But on any Independence Day a perusal of those same papers will fill us with horror if we translate the stories we read there into our own personal experience.

Last year, at the Conference of the National Society for the Prevention of Blindness, Louis Resnick pointed out that in the American War for Independence, 4,044 American soldiers were killed, while in the last 30 years alone 4,290 American citi-

zens have been killed celebrating that victory. In the Revolutionary War 6,000 soldiers were wounded and in the last 30 years 96,000 Americans have been injured on the Fourth of July. Those figures furnish plenty of food for thought and fired by them our Society took stock this year of the situation in Illinois.

There was plenty of newspaper publicity about how sane our Fourth was and yet from the newspapers themselves we found out the following figures:

5 people were killed
152 people suffered accidents to their hands
11 people suffered accidents to their arms
36 people suffered accidents to their faces
21 people suffered accidents to their bodies
18 people suffered general burns and there were
60 serious eye accidents (20 with a total loss of vision)

Now a study of these figures brings to light some interesting material. Of the 60 eye accidents only 26 got into the newspapers. The information on the rest was obtained from the eye physicians of this state by cross-checking our newspaper information with them. If the stories reflected in the newspapers concerning the other accidents were as inadequate as were the stories on the eye accidents, you can see that we got only about one-third of the picture of the real situation in all its gory detail.

There was, as far as we could find out, but one newspaper which carried a warning editorial about the stupidity of the usual Fourth of July celebration. The stories in regard to the five deaths unearthed the following facts:

1. One boy was killed by fireworks bought at a neighboring gas station which was selling fireworks contrary to local ordinances.

2. One little girl was burned to death by a so-called harmless sparkler.

3. One little boy of 9 was killed when he picked up and put in his pocket what he thought was the harmless remains of a regulated community fireworks display which had occurred the evening previous.

It is so easy to get around the local fireworks ordinances that it isn't even amusing. On the Sunday before the Fourth one of our nurses and I drove to the Trachoma country. On one road alone in Cook County--and there are hundreds of such roads--from the city limits to the County line, we counted 90 temporary fireworks stands. I suppose most of the stands were operated by people who wouldn't intentionally hurt a fly and yet their stock in trade was potential loss of life and limb.

Mark Twain once said that everyone talked about the weather but that no one seemed to do anything about it. Our Society is anxious that there be less talk about a sane Fourth and more directed action which will make it really so. Frankly, we are in a quandary as to which will be the better way--will mandatory legislation against the sale of fireworks be effective, or will education, which is always sure and safer, protect our children from these tragedies? It is a subject on which we intend to inform ourselves!

Early in the year the Illinois Health Messenger, which is distributed by the State Department of Public Health, published a list of counties where there was a grave discrepancy between the number of babies born and the amount of Silver Nitrate claimed from the Department of Health. The article said in part, "The strange feature of the situation is that several counties of Illinois appear to use no prophylaxis whatever, regardless of the risk, the law and the prevailing medical opinion. More than a score of counties take advantage of prophylaxis very sparingly. Evidence of this situation is brought out by the records of the State Department of Public Health for the first nine months of 1934. Four counties in which more than 600 babies were born obtained no Silver Nitrate solution whatever from the State Department of Public Health during the period. Another group including twenty-six counties got enough Silver Nitrate for use in the eyes of only 1,884 babies although more than 5,000 births were reported from these counties. When Silver Nitrate solution is distributed free by the State Department of Public Health it is highly improbable that this or other prophylaxis was purchased on the market."

That article did an enormous amount of good. In the first place, the Legislative Division of the State Federation of Women's Clubs did some fine work on investigation in the counties mentioned. Speakers representing our Society spoke at Farm Bureaus and various clubs in those counties and considerable public opinion was worked up as a result of this.

A study of the situation again, nine months later, showed the immediate results of all this activity. In the first quarter of 1935 the amount of Silver Nitrate claimed was increased by 50%. The Department of Health states that more than enough Silver Nitrate to treat every baby born in this quarter was claimed by the various counties of the state.

Again this year our Society checked every birth record for the year, noting every single deviation from the standard prophylaxis mentioned in the law. This list of deviations, which amounted to several hundred, was handed on to the State Department of Public Health and they, in turn, wrote letters to each one of the doctors calling attention to the change in the law and the new requirements. This has resulted in a distinct standardization of treatment in the eyes of new-born babies. Too much praise cannot be given to the State Department of Health for the interest they have taken in prevention of blindness.

The checking on the birth certificates brought out several interesting facts: (1) Deliveries by midwives are rapidly becoming a thing of the past since the Relief Medical Program has gotten under way. (2) What midwives are delivering are using the prescribed prophylaxis - this is even true in Zion.

Last year when we were checking the Pulaski County records, we found 20 records signed by fathers and with a very peculiar fill-in on the prophylaxis line. Instead of the usual fill-in of "Silver Nitrate" there appeared just the word "Boxes." With the kind cooperation of Dr. Jirka who furnished us with a doctor from the Department of Health, we went down to investigate the situation and found, as we had suspected, that the fathers had not delivered the babies but that they had been delivered by several midwives in Pulaski County. We then called on the midwives and the doctor from the State Department told them they must sign the birth records whenever they delivered a baby and then we asked them what was meant by the "Boxes" on the prophylaxis line. They explained to us that they had treated the babies' eyes out of the little boxes we had left them in 1934 which had contained the state solution of Silver Nitrate but they could not remember what the name of the prophylaxis was so they had just filled in the word "Boxes."

The Department of Communicable Diseases has given to the Department of Education and Registration copies of the new Ophthalmia law which have been sent to every licensed doctor in the state and which is given to every new doctor as he is licensed.

And yet, in spite of a good law, in spite of education, in spite of unwearying vigilance, one baby in the state lost its eyes from Ophthalmia Neonatorum. The eyes of a little child is a terrible price to pay for experience and yet from that case we learned a lesson which we hope will save eyesight for other babies in the years to come. The case occurred in a rural county with poor hospital facilities, the authorities did not realize the need for immediate hospitalization and by the time it became apparent that the case was a bad one, it was too late to save the eyes.

Closer cooperation with the medical departments of the I.E.R.C. has resulted from this case and we plan circulation of knowledge as to the virulence of Ophthalmia and the methods by which cases can best be handled. Letters are going out this week on a state-wide plan for quick hospitalization for such cases.

We feel about our Trachoma work exactly as do the fond parents of a difficult baby who has just weathered his second summer! Running four clinics by remote control is a challenge but we have never done any work that has given us so much solid satisfaction as that work down in southern Illinois.

The Federal Government, the State Government and the County groups, the State Department of Public Welfare, the State Department of Public Health, and the Illinois Society for Prevention of Blindness have all had a hand in it, to say nothing of the State Legislature.

Last December Governor Horner released the second $5,000 to us and in March still a third $5,000. Our Society put in another $6,200 and the trick was turned with help from the I.E.R.C. who, beginning last December, gave us a nurse, a janitor, and a laundress for each of the clinics. Of course these projects were written for only 90 days and so we never had much sense of security. Also the red tape of public funds made frequent changes in laundresses and janitors necessary which was often disconcerting--to say the least.

When the I.E.R.C. folded up suddenly on May 1st due to withdrawal of Federal funds, we were left high and dry with no laundresses and no janitors, but our nurses pinned back their hair and scrubbed the floors and filled bottles, in addition to all their other work.

Last November, looking toward a permanent Trachoma program, we drafted a Bill which specified that there should be appropriated to the Department of Welfare, to be distributed by the Eye and Ear Infirmary, the sum of $45,000. for the prevention of blindness by the control of Trachoma. It is a wonderful thing to see incorporated into the statutes of a state a movement like ours because when that happens we know we are not building just for a day. To me a Bill like our Trachoma Bill, or the Baby Bill, or our School Bill, are open doors through which light streams into a darkened room.

Our Trachoma Bill did not go through without opposition. A disgruntled politician who had applied to us for work in the clinics and who had been turned down, prevailed upon one of the local County Medical Societies to protest to the Legislature against the Bill on the grounds that the clinics were taking work away from the

local doctors. However, after a lot of discussion in committee hearings at which we had a chance to explain our work, the Bill passed both houses with more than a two-thirds vote and another piece of legislation which our organization has sponsored became history.

On July 31st, without a moment's warning, we were informed that the I.E.R.C. Work Relief Program would be discontinued as of August 1st. This meant we would not only be short four janitors and four laundresses, but this time the four nurses were affected and this was cataclysmic. Fortunately we had the new Trachoma appropriation to fall back on so that the nurses who had qualified were shifted over to the state payroll and again we spent two and one-half months with no steady janitor or laundress service while we entangled ourselves with all the red tape incident to writing projects on the new W.P.A. plan. Well, due to the splendid help we got from Mrs. Moon and Mrs. Campbell of the W.P.A., and from the Department of Welfare, we wound to some purpose and on October 25th projects covering 5 nurses' aides, 5 janitors, 5 laundresses, and 18 bus transportation lines, went over Mr. McCarl's desk and the money became available for our Trachoma work. The nicest part about the W.P.A. is that instead of lasting just 90 days, it lasts for a year. At the same time two projects for housing our Trachoma clinics went through. In Jonesboro the County Supervisors, who have always been wonderful to us, gave us a house which is on the back of the lot adjoining the Court House, and in Vienna, where we are planning to open a new clinic the Library Board gave us the basement of the Library and the W.P.A. is rebuilding it for us.

The courtesy with which some of the people in the southern part of the state have met our work is simply beautiful. In Jonesboro, where they gave us the old lawyers' room in the Court House, they also gave us the court room for a waiting room but that still left us without a place to take visual acuities, histories, sterilize our instruments or boil the bottles. The room next to the lawyers' room was the office of the County Commissioner of Highways and almost imperceptibly we moved in on him. During the last year we were all over the place three days of every week. One day this Spring I was talking to him and I said, "Mr. Hoenstein, I think God was good to us when he gave us you for a neighbor," and he said, "Well, Miss Hayden, I think I was lucky to get in with you-uns." He seemed perfectly oblivious to the fact that all the courtesy had been on his side.

At times, during all this confusion, we have felt as if we were enjoying a first class nightmare. To synchronize the varying speeds of the Federal, State and County governments and private charitable agencies is just like participating in a Ben Hur chariot race equipped with a pretty fair chariot to which is hitched an elephant, a giraffe, one fine Arabian pony, and a donkey. In order to play no favorites, you will see I have included the Republican elephant and the Democratic donkey in that tandem. These incidents which I have just described did not, strange as it may seem, affect the smooth and orderly running of the clinics. Every morning at 8:30 the clinics opened, with the doctor there and the nurses ready to receive the patients who poured in.

1,322 patients have been under treatment. The aggregate attendance has been 29,554 and 586 operations were performed--operations performed under the most primitive circumstances with not a single operative infection.

During the summer we made a study of the results of our first year's work and it is amazing how a dry statistical summary could lay bare the heart-beat in our work. We found that of the 933 cases included in the study, 486 were on relief, 45 were barely subsisting on farms, 15 had no income and were living with relatives, and the rest were self-supporting. In the group who were self-supporting, the average

weekly income was $10.05 and the average size of the family was five. Yo
how much validity there was in the statement that we were taking pay work
anybody!

Only 183 of the 933 patients lived in the four towns in which th
were located--and the rest lived at varying distances away, the average b
miles. Many of those were hauled in by friends. Some few came in buses p
the I.E.R.C., but the great majority hitch-hiked or walked. One family, co
of a mother and three children, had attended the Shawneetown clinic three time
week for a year and they hitch-hiked 22 miles every time they came.

One day this August when I was in the Shawneetown clinic, I saw that mother sitting in the back of the waiting room working on a patch-work quilt and I said to her, "I never thought the day would dawn when you would have enough eyesight to do that kind of handwork." She put down her needle and said, "Some people praise the Lord, but I praise the Trachoma clinics."

The thing that always thrills me in these clinics is the atmosphere of friendly cooperation between the nurses and doctor and the patients and the courtesy and gratitude which the patients display. I think felicity is the word which describes that amostphere and because of the number of agencies involved in this work, it is wonderful to think that such a word can be used in description of it.

This is a report of 365 busy days spent on Prevention of Blindness in Illinois, and I want to dedicate it to the memory of one whom we all loved and whose going is a bitter loss to us -- Dr. Wilder.

There never would have been an Illinois Society except for an idea which he had over twenty years ago.

Ideas are evanescent and their development is difficult to measure and trace once they are cast into the stream of society.

But today when we can report that our work touched 174 towns in 50 counties of Illinois, we have some measure of the worth of Dr. Wilder's idea. All the thousands of people who were blessed by that service have him to thank for the start he gave us.

The longer I live the surer I am that anyone with a lot of energy and a small amount of wit can execute ideas but we must look to the real geniuses of the world to furnish us with them.

Dr. Wilder was a noble representative of a noble profession. He was not only a skilled surgeon but a scholar off distinction and a wise and courageous friend.

Disinterested advice is the rarest thing in the world but that is what we always got from him. Although he was a man of many important interests, he was never too busy to help us. For twenty years he had a large hand in guiding our policies with selfless and impersonal wisdom and we owe him a debt of gratitude for the dignity and the integrity with which he has invested our work. It will be enough glory for the rest of us if we can keep shining and clear the Legacy of Light which he has handed down to us.

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